

“Raising Eyebrows”

Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6

Proper 4-B, Pentecost 2, June 3, 2018

Raising Eyebrows. I believe it is an expression that many of us have at least heard and maybe even used before. Sometimes people literally “raise their eyebrows” when they have become shocked or surprised by another person’s words or behavior! May I give you two examples?

“Sally’s outburst in the classroom, certainly raised a lot of eyebrows!”

“John raised a lot of eyebrows when he walked down main street, dressed in a winter coat on a hot summer’s day!”

Friends, the American actress and comedian, Roseann Barr certainly raised a lot of eyebrows this past week didn’t she, when she did her best to explain to the American public, this past Tuesday morning, that she had taken an AMBIEN, a sleeping pill, this past Monday evening. She was half-asleep and half-awake when she tweeted a racially-charged statement about Valerie Jarrett who worked as an advisor for President Obama in the White House.

I want to believe that she was sincere when she asked to be forgiven, but the higher-ups at ABC have refused to forgive her. And I want to believe that she was sincere when she said that her primary concern was all of those wonderful people who were going to lose their jobs because of the cancelation of the comeback of her old television sitcom that first aired in the 1980’s.

But when you stop and think about it--have you ever taken time to consider--that in his OWN MYSTERIOUS WAY -- OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST CERTAINLY RAISED A LOT OF EYEBROWS TOO--BOTH IN SOME OF THE THINGS THAT HE SAID AS WELL AS IN THE THINGS THAT HE DID?

Our Gospel lesson this morning comprises 12 verses from St Mark’s Gospel; the last 6 verses of chapter 2 and the first 6 verses of chapter 3. And by this time Jesus had already said and done some things to raise the eyebrows of the Pharisees against him 5 different times!

- (1) The first incidence was when he said to a paralyzed man, whose dear friends went through no small effort--to bring him before Jesus; when they dismantled the thatched roof of a home there in Capernaum where Jesus was preaching the Word of God: “Son your sins are all forgiven!” Because the crowd was so great, they climbed up on the roof, and lowered their paralyzed friend on a cot down from the ceiling--right before the feet of Jesus! Jesus certainly seemed to be very understanding about the whole thing but caused quite a ruckus when he said to that beleaguered man: “Son, your sins are all forgiven you” (Mark 2:5)! You remember how Jesus healed the man--to prove that there was great power behind his word, so that the man took up his cot and walked home that day!
- (2) Again, Jesus raised a lot of eyebrows when he called a despised “tax-collector” to become one of his 12 disciples; a man named Levi, whose Greek name was “Matthew” meaning gift of God (Mark 2:14)!
- (3) Again, Jesus raised a lot of eyebrows when the Pharisees pointed their finger of blame against him, because Jesus’ disciples, unlike the Pharisees’ own disciples and the disciples of John the Baptist--were not fasting twice a week. Jesus did not deny it but openly declared: “How can the wedding guests fast when the Bridegroom is among them” (Mark 2:19)!
- (4) And then in our Gospel lesson today, Jesus certainly raised a lot of eyebrows when he sought to justify the behavior of his disciples, who were plucking heads of grain and snacking on them when they walked through someone else’s wheat fields. The disciples’ behavior would have been deemed even by the Pharisees as being perfectly permissible, on any other day of the week, according to Deuteronomy 23:25. The problem was identified as such by the Pharisees because they were engaging in this sort of legal activity on the SABBATH

DAY, which turned, in their minds, a harmless act of necessity--calming their hunger pangs--into the SIN OF DOING WORK ON THE SABBATH DAY.

Well, Jesus justifies the actions of his disciples, not because of who they are but because of who he is--the LONG-AWAITED AND PROMISED MESSIAH OF THE WORLD! Like a good attorney who must defend his legal grounds based on a similar case that had been tried years before him; Jesus refers his listeners back to an event recorded in I Samuel 21:1-5. David gained omission into the Tabernacle one day--and ate the SHOWBREAD from the altar, that was only permissible to be eaten by the priests, during the days when Abiathar was the High Priest in Jerusalem. David felt justified in doing this--because of who he was. Although he was not openly and outwardly acknowledged to be the King of Israel since King Saul was still alive, he knew that he had already been anointed King as Saul's successor, on the day that the Prophet Samuel entered his father Jesse's home in Bethlehem and did that very thing--justifying his extreme behavior!

Jesus was justifying what he was doing based upon who he knew himself to be, not simply the son of Mary and Joseph, but the Son of the Most-High God, conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

Brothers and sisters, maybe an analogy would be helpful! You and I, as average citizens are never granted the permission to race down the Interstate Highway at 90 miles per hour, but there are times when State Troopers and Paramedics driving an ambulance are empowered by the law to do that very thing, with their blue and red lights flashing--by responding to an emergency in a life and death situation. So, Jesus said his disciples were justified in doing what they were doing--BECAUSE OF WHO JESUS KNEW HIMSELF TO BE, THE LORD OF THE SABBATH!

- (5) And then Jesus heals a man who was suffering from a withered hand...on the Sabbath of all days; once again! It was not a life and death situation! Jesus could have waited, I guess, to Sunday morning to perform this task--but he was demonstrating a very important point here! Thereby, once again, he raised the eyebrows of his opponents by his working on the Sabbath Day.

Then Jesus says something that raised the eyebrows of a lot of people who were there that day for sure! **“THE SABBATH DAY WAS MADE FOR MAN, NOT MAN FOR THE SABBATH, SO THE SON OF MAN IS LORD EVEN OF THE SABBATH” (MARK 2:27-28)!**

In the eyes of the everyday Jew, the **SABBATH WAS MADE FOR GOD!** The Sabbath again was all about doing something primarily for God; when from the very beginning the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY had made the **SABBATH A SPECIAL DAY...FOR THE BENEFIT OF HUMANKIND.**

AS WE LUTHERANS, LIKE ROMAN CATHOLICS AND THOSE IN THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION of Christians number the commandments, this is the Third Commandment found in the Decalogue. In **Deuteronomy 5:12-15** we read today as our Old Testament Lesson: ***“Observe the Sabbath Day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you! Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God! On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male-servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you!”***

The Old Testament Hebrew word for Sabbath is SHABBAT which means most literally “REST.”

Friends, I want you to know how tempting it could be for me, right now, to launch into a rather long discussion about how and when the Day of Worship for us Christians was changed from a Saturday to a Sunday, but I will do my best to curtail my remarks. Officially, the day of Christians to worship was changed from Saturday to Sunday around 321 A.D. when CONSTANTINE, like his mother “Helen,” known as “St Helen,” became a Christian and was

baptized; a man of such influence that he even presided over the first Council of Nicaea that took place in 325 AD.

But have you ever stopped to think, Sundays, like the original Sabbath Day on Saturday, was designed by God for us to be a day to come together and for him to meet with us, so that we might be touched by his presence, and so that we might be given the opportunity and the privilege of hearing his Word of Life and to find the kind of rest in our God that can only be found in our God and his many promises to us?

Sunday is designed, in some respects, to be the best day of the week! It's a day when we are gathered together under the Spirit's power through the Gospel to be refueled, to become refreshed, and to become more sharply refocused on the will and design that God has instore for every one of us with respect to our lives!

I heard about one pastor, who one day, handed out a sheet of paper to every person who was **seated in the worshipping congregation, one Sunday**. It was a piece of paper with **25 statements on it that read like this: "I love _____"** and then the people present were asked to write down the first **25 things that came to mind for them** that they loved and were grateful for!

He asks various worshipers that day to read out loud some of the things they had written down that they loved; but do you know what? **Not even one worshiper had written down on their piece of paper: "I LOVE SUNDAYS!"**

And yet many of us have many reasons to write down, don't we: **"I LOVE SUNDAYS!"** It's a day when God invites us to our special place of worship, to become refreshed, refueled and refocused on all that he had done for us in the gift of his only-begotten Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is a day when we should celebrate above all else that beautiful truth that St. Paul expresses so profoundly to Titus in **TITUS 3:5**, *"When the lovingkindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works that were done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, through a washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit!"* And here, St Paul is speaking about--it's a good day for each of us to remember our Baptisms and all that our Baptisms imply for us!

Sundays were designed by God for us to meet with Him, to be touched by His presence, to hear His Words of Life and to find rest! It is designed by God to be the best day of our week! It's a day to honor God for what He has done for you the other 6 days of the week! It's also a day of rest where we get to refuel, refresh and refocus!

We all have a body and a soul. We all have an outer life and an inner life. My outer life is the public, visible me! My outer life includes all my life's accomplishments, my work, and even my reputation! BUT INSIDE OF ME THERE IS ALSO MY SOUL--THAT PART OF MYSELF--THAT ALL TOO OFTEN SPEAKS IN SILENCE TO OTHERS BUT THAT ALSO YELLS TO ME.

The soul is the inside stuff of real life. My soul is my inner life where my secret thoughts and hopes and even my own personal desires for the future all reside and live there together! Because my soul, that is, my inner life is invisible, it is quite easy for me to neglect. No one else has access to it, except for the LORD God Almighty, therefore it never wins or gains any outside applause.

In the Bible God prescribes 52 Sabbath Days a year that collectively make up 7 and ½ weeks that God gives to you and to me for our spiritual refreshment, to become opportunities to become refueled and refocused on the future he has instore for us! Paul was writing to people who were Christians, but to people who really forgot many times about the immense spiritual blessings that God had instore for them on the other side of the grave. That's why

Paul wrote to the Ephesians one day saying: ***“I pray that the eyes of your hearts might be enlightened, that you might know the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ, when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (Ephesians 1:18-21)!***

So here is a humorous little story about the wife of a man who died who assumed they had plenty of money, so she gave him a very nice funeral and a fancy tombstone that said: “REST IN PEACE”! However, when the estate was settled she learned he had wasted all their money on gambling and bad investments. This made her so angry she took the little money she had and added three words to the tombstone, so that the new tombstone now read: “REST IN PEACE UNTIL I COME”!

Brothers and sisters, you and I do not need to wait until we have a fancy tombstone to rest in peace! The only thing we need is Jesus, whom God the Father, through the Gospel still imparts to our hearts and minds still today. It’s the Jesus who says, “Come unto me and I will give you rest!” It is the Jesus of whom the writer of Hebrews writes when he says in Hebrews 4:9-10, “There remains, therefore a Sabbath Rest for the people of God, for anyone who enters God’s rest, also rests from their own work, just as God did from his!”

When Jesus said, “It is finished in his dying words on the cross, he was saying to you and me that our salvation is a finished work!” “By grace you have been saved through faith, this is not of yourselves; not because of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

So how is your soul today: Is it thriving and growing, or wilting and dying? Are you here that your soul may be fed again today, or are you physically present here, but not primarily here for God to refresh, refuel and restore your soul?

“O day of rest and gladness, O day of joy and light,
O balm of care and sadness, Most beautiful most bright;
This day the high and lowly, through ages joined to bless,
Sing “Holy, holy, holy!” The triune God confess!

This day God’s people meeting, His Holy Scriptures hear!
His living presence greeting, through bread and wine made near!
We journey on, believing, renewed with heavenly might!
From grace to grace receiving, on this blest day of light!” (LSB 906:1, 3) AMEN